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## **Rejoinder – *Clamour of Nationalism* Symposium**

***Journal: ETHNIC AND RACIAL STUDIES***

*It is easier to denounce than affirm.*

It is this unsettling truism that pithily captures why today's nationalism remains such a generative but in equal measure defeatist object to write through. For the *Clamour of Nationalism* (CoN) to be treated to such exactingly kind commentary as provided by the four symposium contributors (Bangstad, Bhattacharyya, Favell, and Papadakis) is certainly gratifying, if also humbling. But it is indeed this above tension as pressed in the contributions that speaks with a distinctive urgency, and all the more so given the sobering electoral result witnessed in Britain over the interim period. This is namely a trap that faces any account of nationalism – whereby, an emphatic account of its polyglot allure that reaches across the ideological spectrum precludes in turn any credible gesture at how the present might actually escape the clutches of nation-thinking and its attendant racial demons. Indeed, a reckoning with how and why nationalism has reasserted itself at the center of today's political culture does even risk a certain seduction, wherein the ability of nationalism to monopolize the terrain of political community exhausts the possibility of any alternative. Put differently, notwithstanding the vainglory of any such statement, I would venture that the putative virtues of *Clamour of Nationalism* are simultaneously its dangers – an analytic staging of contemporary nationalism's fully revitalized power is also to submit to its inevitability vis-à-vis modernity.

As regards the symposium, it is Bhattacharyya who most overtly issues the above consideration, when reflecting that 'what I fear is that nationalism is easier to denounce than to shake off' (p. 1); also noting elsewhere 'that it is easier to know what we are against than what we are for' (p. 7). But this remains a general anxiety that organizes, to varying extents, all four commentators. And whilst they all share a certain resignation to the suffocating ubiquity of nationalism, also vital is their implicit call to continue to reckon with the contradictions and therein also the openings that live amidst the nationalist closure. As has been a hallmark of most thinkers who endure, not least the tradition of Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy I am most mostly closely acquainted with, it is the serious task of affirmation that is equally central to the task of critical theory. To settle for the comforts of critical flourish is to forego the terms by which life is already rendered worthwhile and/or bearable. And it is to remain unmoved by those currents in the minor key that continue to offer registers by which to forge alternative majorities. Similarly, as opposed to taking only refuge in the courage of fringe resistances, vital as they of course are, it is across the always-sullied terrain of the already-popular that the possibility of alternative majorities must also be staked.

It is accordingly this overarching problem of 'nationalist defeatism' that I will center in this 'rejoinder'. This necessarily results in many of the contributions'

other themes being omitted. This omission includes their careful reaffirmation of my own centering of race to the story of today's Western nationalisms. It includes their largely complementary theorization of the different ideological traditions that service nationalism's contemporary preeminence, with Bangstad and Papadakis reserving particular invective for the broader traps of left nationalism, a timely critique given the reheated call for 'progressive patriotism' being currently sounded in Britain. And it includes their attentiveness to the geographical reach of my approach, but also, therein, the possible geographical *limits* – Favell (p. 2) is particularly insistent about these limits, though he might be attributing far too much exceptionalism to the UK here, unexpectedly playing into one of the more prized maxims of 'Our Island Story' British myopia. Some of the contexts mentioned by the contributors extend, after all, from the North of England, to Hong Kong, to a generic Europe; particularly affirming for me however, given my Scandinavian background, is Bangstad's deft transposing of the book's argument to contemporary Norway.

### **Collectives beyond nationalism**

A common tension identified in the commentary concerns the need for a fuller engagement of debates about *populism*, warts and all. Bangstad and Bhattacharyya prove particularly insightful here, spying in my argument an underworked position on the populist possibility. And whilst largely agreeing with my recurring contention that it is the ascription of nationalism and not populism that better captures the current political moment, they both raise here intriguing questions about what a left-oriented theorization of populism might look like.

Bangstad is rightly surprised by the book's only rather passing reckoning with the attempt by Mouffe and her successors to rehabilitate populism. He himself, much like Fassin (2020) in his hotly discussed *Populism Left and Right*, does remain suspicious of Mouffe's general thesis, and particularly her attempt to weave Hall into her argument. But despite this constructive doubt, Bangstad (p. 7) does with justification question my own omission of Mouffe and, by implication, Laclau too.

But in such a well-informed and broad survey of the current ideological terrain of the European left, I would still have liked to see a direct scholarly engagement on Valluvan's part with the work of the political theorist Chantal Mouffe, who in arguing for a left nationalist populism has also invoked the legacy Stuart Hall. It seems to me somewhat dishonest on Mouffe's part to position her current work as preserving the legacy of the late Hall, given that Hall in his lifetime indicated very strongly and in his own writings that he had tired of Laclau and Mouffe's discursive and metaphysical turn. [But] given how influential that work has been for a certain strand of left nationalist populism that Valluvan is clearly opposed to, it would be eminently useful to have a more concrete engagement with it in Valluvan's work: Laclau's influential work on populism is not even mentioned herein.

This is fairly put. Bhattacharyya extends this by weighing a set of unsettling questions about the possibility of mass politics that lives with 'the shadow of nationalism'. As she puts it in her inimitable wording, 'What I fear is that the

terrain of politics is so deeply shaped by the histories and institutional formations of nationalism that even our best dreams of freedom contain the shadow of that other exclusionary logic' (p. 1). Bhattacharyya centers here the profound risks intrinsic to doing popular politics, wherein she suggests that the risk of majoritarian authoritarianism inheres in any attempt to name the people as a collective vis-à-vis an 'externalised' malignant force (ideally understood as capital and its principal elite beneficiaries). But equally, and I think rightly, she also intimates that these risks cannot be escaped – to refuse these risks is to tend towards a quietism or splendid isolation free of fear but therein free of the mass possibility as well.

There are many giving resonances here with Sita Balani's (2019) virtuoso *Verso* essay as written in the heady run-up to the British general election, during which many a soul of a radical vintage rallied to the call of Labour Corbynism – canvassing thanklessly in the unforgiving winter in the feeble hope that another state, however compromised, was within tangible grasp. Balani brings forth in this essay a searching and always empathetic critique of certain radical tendencies, arguing that the battle on the fringes for a resolute political clarity and the parallel promise of 'safety' proves futile and even ephemeral when tasked with the vagaries of 'doorsteps' (as a proxy for the vagaries of the public, writ large) and when tasked with the not insignificant hope of forging a collective mass across all its messy contradictions, inconveniences and fragmentations.

Balani's moving piece helps clinch in a particularly salutary manner the critical thrust of this symposium. The broader interrogation that takes shape in the symposium is namely two-fold. First, uncomfortable but vital questions about imagining or defending the popular in spite of its tendency towards nativist capture; and second, what might this accordingly reveal as regards the character of contemporary political *collectivism* in a more general sense. Related to this is an underlying desire, in the face of today's political cataclysm, for a more affirmative analysis to be realized – asking for an unpacking of the premises by which an alternative beyond nationalist consolidations might be glimpsed.

### **The populist possibility?**

In order to engage more fully with these considerations, I first restate a basic précis of populism as advanced in the book (Valluvan, 2019: 60-67). It remains the case that a lazy invocation of the term populism is at times nothing less than a condescending, *bien-pensant* dismissal of those political positions that appear to be popular at any given moment – i.e. those ostensibly popular positions that fail to stage the wider affections of 'moderation' and/or class discernment. This rendition of the term populism as a mere pejorative frequently deployed by merchants of sanctimonious and often well-heeled 'centrism' is rightly worthy of all the criticism it meets.

This caveat aside, I do still remain wary of the prevailing tendency of much punditry to read contemporary politics as constituting a populist moment. What I find frustrating, in agreement with the contributors, is that today's 'xenoracist'

nationalisms are being badged by many a European thinker as *simply* populism. This is not helpful, as it denies the very substantive and often racialised exclusionary assertions typical of these nationalisms; and instead, it tends to see contemporary politics as simply some kind of anti-elite energy as sourced in a vague but diffuse discontent that is equally available across the political spectrum – be it right-wing xenophobia, anti-corruption centrism, or a revived left socialism.

Indeed, it is worth noting that much of what is often conceptually ascribed to populism seems to me, by default, nationalism – given the ‘family resemblances’ between populism’s rousing appeal to ‘the people’ on the one hand, and, on the other, the long legacy of nationalism’s ability to already mediate how we intuitively understand any such appeal to the people and its constitutive Others. In more blunt terms, the appeal to the people that is considered central to populism is I believe already so heavily circumscribed by nationalism’s parochial chauvinism. In short, it is nation (as it operates through communitarian invocations of race, ethnicity and religion) that modernity has privileged as the basis by which to imagine and render *political* community. And this creates problems for any attempt at a populist invocation – of a ‘we and them’, ‘us against evil’, ‘the authentic versus the fraudulent’ – that is not reflective about this deep intertwining.

It remains however true that any socialist inclined naming of a profiteering class against whom a majority might be named is not entirely dissimilar to the political templates characteristic of populism (Matthews, 2019). But here we might want to retain one feature of what is understood as populism but dispense with the other. Whilst the urge to summon a prospective mass against the ‘externalisable enemy’ (Bhattacharyya: p. 4) might be to some extent unavoidable as regards a politics of class antagonism, it need not also accord with the levels of *simplified* reductionism (Farris, 2017: 133) also commonly ascribed to populism as a signature trait. Put differently, the imaginative work required for rethinking our intuitive conceptions of ‘political community’, which currently retreats towards communitarian frameworks as tied to nation, will likely require a complexity and dreaming that is not easily reconciled with populism’s tendency towards crass simplification of the political equation.<sup>1</sup>

Bhattacharyya’s spirited call for a critical *complexity* is accordingly vital here – one that does not balk at the challenges of forging an alternative collective but does not elide either the dangers that are intrinsic to such moments. The risks that racial and ethnic minorities face whenever a significant oppositional force take shape are well-documented, wherein their perspectives are summarily silenced and, worse yet, they are often seen as inconvenient presences upon whom an opportunist ire might be trained. Minorities are herein always exposed to the fickle munificence of the self-anointed majority; but Bhattacharyya scans various global contexts as a springboard to explore the terms by which

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<sup>1</sup> Any such complexity will also allow for a political acknowledgement that many people being appealed to by left populists often occupy rather ambivalent socioeconomic locations *vis-à-vis* capitalist moralities and distribution alike – and the challenges this accordingly poses to any attempt to rally a mass along a simplified sense of capitalist injustice and anti-‘elite’ rhetoric.

participation in such mass movements must still be entertained. I sense in Bhattacharyya's contribution, when seen from the British perspective, an intimation that the many dangers and inadequacies of participation in say Corbynism, XR, trade unionism/workplace actions, door knocking, or even various pro-Remain campaigns, in spite of the latter's often empty, often exclusive pretences of centrist 'reasonableness', are only superseded by the dangers of *not* participating. As she says,

Not everyone can take part and political activism is too dangerous for some. Of course we know that. What we say to each other less often is that *non-participation* in struggles that capture popular imagination can bring new dangers and violences (Bhattacharyya: p. 7, emphasis added).

The more obvious of these dangers that obtain from 'non-participation' would seem to be the inevitable weakening of the broader critical mass that could otherwise take shape. Non-participation also constitutes a potential foregoing of the important opportunities to constructively influence in good faith any such popular opposition. But Bhattacharyya's emphasis is also one that speaks to a darker fear as tied to the communitarian streak that is often latent in any such popular opposition – wherein non-participation also further exposes oneself to 'their' cruel and often racialised indifference, becoming even a disposable target of the oppositional force's resentful violence. There is a lot jockeying for attention in this sobering observation that does not invite easy answers and is best reserved for a longer and more searching conversation. But Bhattacharyya's piece does in a more general sense help crystallise the serious challenges of identifying an externalisable antagonism against which to anchor a popular cause whilst also vigilantly guarding against its lapses to an exclusionary communitarian template.

### **The ruptures of nationalism**

It is my belief, as regards the United Kingdom, that Corbynism did briefly hint at some of this wider mass-making maturity. Favell (p. 7) is admittedly right to caution against inferring too breezily, describing the surge in optimism as merely 'that 2017 moment' which has hardly endured. The collective wake precipitated by the December 12 catastrophe would seem to vindicate his vigilance.

The broader intimation of total failure is however I think too premature, whereby, as regards the staging of a substantial left alternative in Britain, Corbynism still constitutes a vital milestone. Corbynism was from its inception, a high accidental, always beleaguered, and, at times, anachronistically stubborn programme. Equally so, the disciplined Tory consolidation of the nationalist terrain as documented in *CoN*, was always bound to triumph against a scruffily assembled left politics – particularly when the election was itself insistently filtered through the Brexit impasse, an impasse scarcely conducive to a non-nationalist left pivot. But Corbynism, at its best, did also represent a wider spirit of staking an alternative claim on the mass. This is no minor feat. In the raw immediacy of the electoral loss, it has been easy to forget that to even speak credibly of a left alternative is entirely without recent precedent. This is also an era when digital media circulation, which is particularly vulnerable to targeted

manipulation and voter suppression (Cadwalladr, 2020), and the wider siren call of the ‘distraction economy’ as serviced so plentifully by niche-casting culture industries, interact powerfully to induce apathy, resignation, and/or paralysing single-issue retreat. It is hereby particularly remarkable that a plucky attempt to raise a broad left-oriented political vehicle had *any* traction – the comprehensive support Labour won amongst under-50s being particularly encouraging here.

And whilst these alternative-populars remain both nascent and for now chastened, a few speculations about the broader fault-lines that afflict today’s nationalism are also worth profiling – even if in the spirit of hope, and less so analytic confidence. Put simply, an acknowledgement of the contradictions that suffuse the nationalisms currently ascendant might also allow for a better sense of the alternative political formations that still vie for attention.

First, recent trends in the UK, but also comparable developments elsewhere, have seen the formal right capitulate in full to ‘disaster nationalism’. As coined by the ever-insightful Richard Seymour (2019a), this amounts to the full messianic exhalation of nationalist panaceas, adventure and hubris irrespective of the governmental, economic and planetary pain and dysfunction it in actuality accelerates. Not too long ago, constitutive nationalist themes were essentially *complementary* to the right’s broader story of capitalist uplift, business evangelism, and small-state utopias. As argued in *CoN*, themes as regards historical heritage and cultural coherence, the scourge of immigration, and the villainy of generalized foreign entities such as the EU, ‘liberal internationalist’ institutions, or, of late, China, were all certainly visible. But they did not supplant the wider triumph of the right’s confident commitment to capitalist individualism, the meritocratic conceit, and the wider social mobility contract allied to it. Similarly, a small-business, shopkeeper ethos as aligned to union bashing, welfare shaming and austerity pragmatism still commanded the wider *raison d’être* of the mainstream right. The incremental drift however of its press and electoral strategy towards the nativist politics of nativist aversion and pathological nostalgia has gradually yielded what might in the UK be best described as the full ‘Faragisation’ of the right (Seymour, 2019b).

This consolidation does admittedly seem unassailable – and particularly so when aided by the accentuated circulation economies of social/digital media. This being an economic imperative that privileges the ‘insomniac’ (Gilroy, 2019) energies of injured identity (the majoritarian form of which will always triumph), sensationalist alarmism (which is therein highly responsive to racialised scaremongering), and self-confirmatory looping (which therein preemptively repudiates any possibilities of critique). This tendency is compounded by the wider discipline of the legacy press to zealously cheerlead any iteration of anti-left politics. It is within this context that, the world over, the right’s submission to an unadulterated nationalism has allowed to it rally the majorities sufficient to sustain power.

But this is, crucially, a reconfigured hegemony. Insofar as, the right-populist capture is cast along a increasingly thin premise; or rather, it has overinvested in a nationalist prism and the wider ‘culture wars’ cognate to it as regards

race/anti-racism, gender/feminism, and even environmentalism/'lifestyle'. Inversely, the partial vacating of a capitalist common-sense – which might be crudely summarised as the 'fuck business' asides that the current doyens of the right are not averse to – leaves indeed an ideological void that has seldom been present. After all, the 2019 General Election campaign saw very little that amounted to a conventional defence of capitalist virtue. Indeed, owing to such an audible silence, the Conservative electoral strategy might even be described as a non-campaign. Yes, the residual spectre of anti-communism red-smearing still does a remarkable amount of what at times seems to be rather anachronistic ideological work; but this remains only a politics of 'resentment' (Davies, 2019) and negation, as opposed to it affirming any textured capitalist commitment.

And indeed, the right's putative re-enchantment with the (white) 'working class' as the image in whose name it champions a nationalist mandate does yield certain complications to how it presents itself: as was, in fact, pressed quite effectively by the BBC's Andrew Neil in the early hours of the election result. We have seen, in other words, a strange rehabilitation of the language of class, but one that empties it of any materialist, socioeconomic content. This rehabilitation has been proactively recycled by left-communitarian apologists, whose own understanding of class, having been underdeveloped, are promptly seduced by the right's opportunistic claim to the working class as the site at which the 'ur' national subject, and its constitutive *cultural* discontents, can be most authentically located. This key trope certainly does an extraordinary amount of work for lending racial nationalism a politically edifying sense of injury, victimhood and frustrated dignity. And as Papadakis explains, the operational emphasis here is certainly on the 'white', it licensing a whole raft of other white-entitlement premises. But it is also my hunch that the parallel appeal to 'working class' cannot be rendered wholly silent, acting only as an expedient placeholder. The contradictions of this appellation pose in turn certain not insignificant complications in terms of how it might harness its overtures to the wronged 'working class' whilst also having to sustain core austerity, privatisation, low-tax and post-Brexit 'shock doctrine' policies. And notwithstanding the proverbial 'red-brown' pivot that acts an ominous portent of how such a contradiction might be conjuncturally resolved, it exposes the conventional right in formidable ways.

The radical reconstituting of the right is certainly not without very tangible consequences as regards our political discourse and the everyday violence it demands *vis-à-vis* migrants, domestic minorities and dissenters; but it also signals a certain 'rupture' (Seymour, 2019c) that was previously absent. This prospective void in the capitalist conceit is further compounded by the generational urgency finding its voice *vis-à-vis* climate breakdown. The eschatological immanence of climate breakdown will only be met with a transformation equal to that scale – allowing for the left in its more youthful guise to insist upon political agendas that finally jettison the illusory merits of triangulated moderation and market realism.



Similarly, the fact that the new working classes (broadly construed) are being forged in urban settings more receptive to sentiments of multicultural indicates a prospective green socialist politics more suspicious of nationalist invitations. Much has been already said about the marked age spread regarding the recent general election. And I do caution in *CoN* against reading this as a cohort effect, as there are myriad life-course effects that can render a putatively progressive generation more receptive, in time, to a petty-bourgeois, provincial defensiveness. Nonetheless, these emergent generations (spanning the 18-49 bracket) not only voted overwhelmingly for a Corbyn-led Labour, but it also does constitute a working class/lower middle-class that is less likely to encounter the forms of wealth mobility or socioeconomic stability as experienced by many of their older peers. For instance, this is a constituency who remains unable to access the property market and will likely remain asset-poor (Graeber, 2020); they are disastrously exposed to the ravages of rentier capitalism through housing but also student debt; they are no longer credibly strapped into anything resembling the social mobility contract; and they are also less able to find secure, permanent work, depending instead on transient positions as often structured by the platform economy. And amidst the embedding of these classed realities, particularly generative for me is these generations' increased exposure to those urban settings and popular cultures where a relatively unfussy anti-nationalist temperament is not uncommon.

### **Multiculture and post-nationalism**

These admittedly hopeful speculations as regards the formalisation of a non and/or post nationalist political inclination anticipates in turn the second critical angle that surfaces in the symposium. This being, in the words of Bangstad, the uses of 'anthropology' and, in the less flattering phrasing of Favell (p.3), a certain frustration with what he describes as the allegedly 'literary theory', 'anti-positivist' inclination of those of us partial to postcolonial theory and cultural studies.

Bangstad observes here how a current fashion for commentary on all things populist-nationalism has yet to yield a complementary commentary about how such ideological positions and anxieties actually land in the everyday, and across different locations.

Valluvan's intervention is also and admittedly one of theorizing. He does theorizing better and with more detail and nuance than most scholars in this contested field. It is of course a bit of a tired cliché by now, but as a social anthropologist by training, I sometimes find myself wanting to hear more of and from those attracted to and receptive to the messaging of nationalist populism, left or right. In as much as by now a considerable amount of scholarly thinking on the topic of 'nationalist populism' can be said to engage in a proverbial 'violence of abstraction', ethnographic works that explore the lifeworlds of 'nationalist populists' are still surprisingly few and far between (Bangstad: p.4).

I admit that my own thinking does continue to be drawn into the particulars of ideological formation. But as Hall (1980), Williams (2019) and fellow-travellers always insisted, ideological production is only the obverse side of social formation, with the reverse being the terms by which such ideas and sentiments

are made to bear in local, quotidian settings and in ways that are not simply epiphenomenal of any preceding ideological interface.

It was in fact with this consideration in mind that the conclusion to *CoN* entertained some more affirmative notes about the already-available multicultures that act as a lived resource that helps unsettle the overtures of nation. The symposium contributors are favorable to this attempt, with Bangstad drawing parallels with his ongoing research in Oslo East. Bhattacharyya (p.3) and Favell (pp. 9-10) do however also note some implicit dangers here. Principally, both explore in fascinating ways how a coopted account of multiculturalism could become a particularly seductive basis by which the remit of nation might be notionally enlarged but its underlying logic of exclusive belonging also fundamentally reinforced.

A couple elaborations are herein warranted. First, I repeat here that I do not myself see this multiculturalism as a basis to widening the scope of belonging via which national identity can be made to cohere along more hospitable lines. I agree that this remains a false horizon – as a new *politics* of belonging is necessarily contingent to a new politics of non-belonging (this is indeed a fairly significant aspect of *CoN*'s Chapter 3 as regards liberal/'civic' nationalisms). It is rather that the realities of multiculturalism, and its intuitive normalization of difference and flux, acts for me as a stay on nationalist sensibilities – a stay on the appeal to nation as a cipher by which our political concerns can be unlocked. It is, in other words, an estrangement from the nation and communitarian belonging as the basis by which to narrate our political problems and by which to source our political redemption. It is not that the various renditions of communitarian identity fade into a happy oblivion, but rather, it ceases to exercise as meaningful a role in our capacities to inflect the political.

As such, multiculturalism is also not for me a political template that might sustain a broader political ideal unmarked by capitalism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and reaction more broadly. My objective is rather more modest here. Again, I appeal to multiculturalism as denoting only what I consider to be a useful *deconstructive* tendency vis-à-vis the explicitly communitarian casting of political desire (this being the expansive nation-state premise decisive in determining modernity vis-à-vis the political). Put differently, nationalism for me is the wider modern arc by which so much political thinking and desire is twinned intuitively to an assertion of the nation, and therein becomes preoccupied by the myriad anxieties as ascribed to the nation's constitutive Others. Conversely, lived multiculturalism is for me the steady cementing of an everyday reflex that national identity holds no such solace and whose constitutive conceptions of the communitarian Other dissolve as being either irrelevant, contradictory and/or transparently reactionary. (Indeed, as Leddy-Owen (2019) recently argued in a close reading of contemporary Portsmouth, the idea of nation tends in fact to enjoy very little everyday salience – its abstracted and often metaphorical claims are more readily reserved for the realm of political discourse and ideology whilst having little cultural tangibility in the daily doings of local people).

More importantly, this concluding chapter tried to gesture at the possibilities of any such intuitive suspicion of nation to be scaled up in ways that might allow for broader geographic traction. In other words, the concluding chapter of *CoN* attempted to point towards a more ambitious archiving of this everyday multiculturalism. This is an archiving and attendant circulation (after all, we increasingly live as much through YouTube and its analogues as we do any other space [James, 2020]) that might begin to offer our populations, including those who reside in more provincial settings, a respite from the satisfying clarity that national identity otherwise offers.

I also passingly note that it is a little hasty of Favell (p.10) to preemptively fear here an erasure of Eastern European migrants and their offspring from any such palimpsest consideration of multiculturalism's inhabitations and histories. I agree that the rooting of Eastern Europeans across various British cities and towns does certainly help further destabilize the nationalist impulse to index conceptions of space, culture and political community to tidy taxonomies of race and ethnicity (even if future passages of their young into a more normative, unmarked whiteness/Britishness does remain a complicating possibility [Fox and Mogilnicka, 2017]). After all, it is not uninteresting that in *CoN* it was David Vujacic that I briefly bracketed together with Big Narstie and Grime for Corbyn when thinking through the popular and unaffected reach of an commonplace multiculturalism-premised radicalism (Valluvan, 2019: 206). Similarly, having grown up in Stockholm, the significant Balkan-origin presence in those working-class spaces most immediate to me was of course formative for my own early attempts to think through a politically generative multiculturalism.

As regards a wider purposing of multiculturalism, it is Papadakis' energetic commentary that resonates particularly well – her symposium piece patiently undermining the particular cultural geographies that have become key to England's own peculiar staging of earthy nativism. Papadakis outlines the terms by which the idea of 'The North' has obtained an iconic status amongst nationalist apologists. Where once it stood in the popular imagination for the sociopolitical consciousness as forged via the socialisms of a chartist, co-operative, union, and vernacular variety,<sup>2</sup> it is now rallied to convey an authentic subject in whom a politics of national retrenchment and 'legitimate concerns' (Penny, 2019) about the outsider are readily vested.

Papadakis' voice is accordingly crucial. Her doctoral research as profiled in her contribution is geared towards a reading of migration and 'dispersion' (p.3) that refuses the templates of 'methodological nationalism' (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002) – i.e. forms of ostensibly intra-national migration from North-to-South that cut therein across the symbolic geographies that contour Britain's political mythology. Whilst careful not to flatten the uneven structural penalties and demagogues faced by migrants as depending on other ethno-racial and class factors, Papadakis (pp. 5-6) shapes to prize open narrations of the Northerner's experience in ways that might invite a wider 'migrant city' (Back *et*

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<sup>2</sup> Though, as Papadakis rightly reminds us, these Northern areas were also shaped by an industrial wealth that was of course contingent on its centripetal location as regards imperial economies.

*al.*, 2018) solidarity and/or anti-national political personality. Her approach is, in other words, an estranging device that aims to relocate the Northerner outside of the insistent claim to English/British nationhood that otherwise prevails. It instead looks to tie the Northerner enduring late capitalist London life to the 'working-class cosmopolitanisms' (Rogaly, *forthcoming*) as already available in both residual and emergent registers. Such vital work helps challenge herein the reheated confidence of Blue Labour and its peers, who tout their communitarian nostrum as the only means to rescue a social democratic politics that might plausibly command working-class appeal. Instead, by drawing upon the canonical theorization of Avtar Brah (1996), Papadakis adds to the wider catalogue of ethnographic work that refuses to accept the badge of 'social conservatism' (popularly construed as the politics of 'flag, faith and family') that our intelligentsia would have us believe is the permanent and unique province of the working classes.

And whilst so very much has been already said about the dangers of the left communitarian position, I reiterate that the casting of the provincial working class as the engine room of nationalist politics is to traffic in a series of dangerous analytic errors. It elides other equally if not more numerable demographics that carry the cause of Tory nationalism; it summarily ignores the disproportionate working-class location of migrant and minority constituencies; it assumes the electoral North as synonymous with working class when in fact the class profile of those in the Midlands and North voting for the Johnson iteration of Brexit rapture is rather more complex (see particularly the class location of those *older* voters turning right); and also, and perhaps most fatally, it risks tautologically preempting its own thesis. As regards the latter, in assuming that working-class voters are by constitution socially conservative, a defeatist premise that that 'twas ever thus' and shall always remain so is prematurely conceded.

In conclusion, it seems to me that a helpful sociological stance is to try to press against this insistent fatalism via a different documenting of lives as they are already lived, and indeed, have been lived. The objective here is bring through the already available cultural common-senses and histories that speak to the prosaic inhabiting of difference and even internationalism but in ways that can also locate such everyday realities amidst the provincial, the town, and 'the North'. Whilst the nationalisms that presently ravage us can be derided as being hateful but also illusory *vis-à-vis* the problems they pretend to solve, equally vital is the small matter of offering people a different repertoire through which to make sense of their lives and through which to narrate their experiences. The sociological sensibilities that might attest to these deep archives of multiculture seem to me central to any such hope.

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